

# Old Skool Games

Bringing the gaming past to the present

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OSG talks with Alistair "Boz"  
Bowness about his radio show,  
music, and games



ESWAT



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Firelord

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*Insert coin to continue..*

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# Happy New Year from Old Skool Games!

With the year 2005 behind us, it is a time of fresh starts, new goals, and bright horizons. All over the world people look forward to 2006 with a burst of fresh optimism, as well as a humbled reflection upon their past. At Old Skool Games we proudly do the same, and we are now resolved even harder to continue to bring you quality content in every word-packed issue. Like every publication, we've had a few bumps along the way. But with each passing year, with each new reader, and with each new issue, we have become that much more accepted by and etched into the Internet community. So with the book now closed on the year 2005, and a whole new 2006 year to get under our belts, we resolve once again, to keep the spirit of old skool gaming alive!

On behalf of everyone at Old Skool Games, I wish everyone a Happy New Year and the best of luck in all your endeavors.

Sincerely,

**-Zachary M Bartels**

Editor in Chief, Old Skool Games.



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# A Bowness Interview o' Bollocks

Interview conducted by: Zachary Bartels

This month I've had the chance to sit down and talk with SLAY Radio personality, Alistair "Boz" Bowness. For those who aren't in the know, [SLAY Radio](#) is a somewhat popular Internet radio station that plays Commodore 64 remixes, and also features LIVE broadcasts.

**OSG:** Thanks for taking the time to speak with us, how about a little background on yourself?

**BOZ:** My name is Alistair Bowness, but everyone calls me Boz, and I've been called that since I was about 15 years old. I originally come from Leicester, UK; but I'm now living in Gothenburg, Sweden. I guess I just felt I'd outgrown the UK and I wanted to experience another European country. I have friends in Gothenburg, and English is their second language, so it was a logical move to make.

**OSG:** Most people probably know you best from your show on SLAY Radio, but what other talents are you credited with? I've heard mention of running your own business and such, can you elaborate more on that?

**BOZ:** Yes, the computer I was most connected to was the Commodore 64, and all of my spin-off hobbies have been related to that. I got to know Chris Abbott, who runs a shop selling commercial CDs of remixed Commodore 64 tunes. When Back in Time 3 came about, Chris asked me to get on board and co-produce the CD. Back in Time 3 was basically constructed as though it was the music to an unmade sci-fi film. We then produced Karma 64, more of a "fun" CD. More recently, I was producer and director of the Back in Time Live DVD, which had footage of live bands playing Commodore 64 remixes. I've remixed a few tunes myself, but these days my main hobby is the SLAY Radio show I do on Wednesday's.

To keep me afloat in the real world, I'm a programmer and web designer; mainly working on so-called "vertical markets". My most recent ongoing project is to write the software for one of those photo kiosks where you can take your digital camera's memory card and instantly print photos.

**OSG:** You definitely seem to have a bit of programming experience under you belt. Could you give a little insight into what kind of machines and languages you worked with, and what kind of projects you have worked on? How would programming for a C64 compare to say, programming for an Amiga? What kind of pitfalls are out there, in terms of common trip-ups for any programmer working with these ancient machines?

**BOZ:** I had the ZX-81 and ZX-Spectrum computers to begin with, which if I remember, were marketed as the Timex

1000 and Timex 1500 in the US. But I really only learned BASIC on those machines. When I got my Commodore 64 in 1985, I learned machine language. The Commodore 64, like some other machines of the time, had a 6502 CPU. It was a great little chip that had a handful of instructions, one accumulator (an 8-bit value that most commands performed their processes on) and two data registers (which aided some commands, or you transferred over to the accumulator). The C64 had a Raster Interrupt, which meant you could fire off some machine language at certain raster positions on the screen. You had to make sure that your instructions took up a certain amount of "clock cycles" sometimes, to get some of the effects that the C64 was famous for. Get it wrong, and it didn't work properly.

After that, I got an Amiga 500. This had a Motorola 68000 CPU in it (16 bit). More commands, more accumulators and data registers, made it a lovely computer to program for, and the Copper (a video co-processor) meant you could fire off certain video effects at certain positions on the screen. The Amiga was easier to work on, but the challenge of trying to pack lots of punch in the Commodore 64 made it the more interesting computer to work on.

**OSG:** Is there any game or program in particular that you prize most above all others? If so what lead you to have such strong feelings for this specific piece of work?

**BOZ:** Well, the game I'm most proud of would be "Invaders 2" which appeared on a gamedisk in 1992, for the Amiga. It was based on the Atari console game "The Empire Strikes Back", where you had a sideways view of a ship trying to bring down AT-ATs. My version was similar, but had big spaceships, and a lot of ground-based meanies trying to take you out. My friend Edward did some beautiful graphics for it, and it all came together pretty well.



( The Empire Strikes Back )

On the C64, I recently (2003) made a small demo with the Street Hawk music in it. This music, composed by Martin

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Galway, was thought to be lost, but Martin found an old 5.25" disk with his work on it, and I actually wrote an assembler, to assemble his project, and we got the music (this was on Project: Galway, a two-CD set of music recorded straight from his original computer).



( The Invaders 2 )

**OSG:** Moving along now, you seem to have started a nice hobby for yourself in remixing, mostly to do with the C64 scene. How did you get started with remixes, and what did you go through in the process of honing your skills?

**BOZ:** I originally started writing odd bits of original tunes using "Trackers" on the Amiga. Then I realised I was remixing old Commodore 64 tunes. When I took the inevitable step of getting a PC, I used FastTracker 2 (basically another tracker), and that's when I got to know Chris Abbott, who heard some of my work and asked me to be more involved with his composing.

These days I use Cakewalk Sonar, FruityLoops, or Renoise, depending on what mood I'm in and what sort of music I'm doing; although it's been a little while since I've worked on a remix (because of the move to Sweden and the Radio stuff).

**OSG:** What sort of equipment do you use for composing remixes? These days it seems common sense for most folks to at least have some kind of MIDI keyboard, but has it ever been the case to have worked without one? Also, what type of software do you typically use to build-up your tunes?

**BOZ:** With "Tracker" type software, you don't really need a keyboard. However, when I started using Sonar I bought myself an E-Mu E-Synth keyboard, which was a MIDI keyboard but with a good set of sounds. Now that VSTi instruments are all the rage, I actually sold my E-Synth and I don't use a keyboard at all. Renoise is tracker-based software, so I've come full circle in the way that I compose!

I nearly always use SID2MIDI, too. This is a piece of soft-

ware that "reads" an old SID tune (SID being the name of the sound chip in the C64) and converts the sound into a MIDI file. This ensures that I have exactly the right notes and lengths, so that listeners won't suddenly say, "Hey! That's not like the original!" (although nowadays people are wanting more "experimental" versions of tunes, I've noticed)

**OSG:** How difficult is it to remix a tune? As we all know, if a tune sounds too much like the original or too dissimilar, the point of the work is usually lost on its audience. Do you have any advice for people who wish to break-in to the remixing field?

**BOZ:** The word "difficult" is, in itself, difficult! I think the best thing to do is experiment – a lot! That's what I did! There are a LOT of files I got rid of when, after listening to them, they just sounded awful! No one expects your first remixes to be perfect, so don't be afraid to ask a fellow remixer with a good ear for music to listen and give advice. Try and get a good collection of instruments too, if you don't have enough of a library, you'll find yourself getting frustrated with the limited sounds you're getting.

**OSG:** What's your take on the old adage, "changing some instruments and substituting a few notes isn't considered a remix"? Would you ever argue that for some tunes, it is simply impossible to improve on the music, or change it in a significant way?

**BOZ:** Ah, the old "SID+Drums", as it's sometimes called! Well, if the tune can't be improved upon, then it shouldn't be remixed in the first place, I guess. But because C64 tunes are only three channels max, I would think that there's always some scope. But you're right – sometimes no instrument can do the original sound of the SID chip justice. There's no shame in recording the lead instrument straight from the SID tune itself and using it in a remix though, as long as it's complemented with other sounds along the way!

**OSG:** How did you first come across SLAY Radio, and what truly inspired you to decide to set up your own show?

**BOZ:** Chris Abbott and I recorded a radio show for a friend, called "The Worst SIDs Ever", where we played snippets of truly awful SID tunes. Slaygon, owner of SLAY Radio, heard this and asked if he could play it on his station that he had been running for a couple of years. That's how I got to know Slaygon, anyway. About a year later, I had just bought myself a new PC with a decent soundcard and mixer, and around this time a few people had done pre-recorded and live shows on SLAY. So, I just asked if myself and Kenz (who I was sharing a house with at the time) could do a pre-recorded show. We enjoyed doing it so much that we asked to do a live show one Sunday. This became a regular slot and the show became The Z Show

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(because both of our nicks ended with Z).

Then I actually met Slaygon in person, and stayed over with a bunch of DJs and composers and aired the first "Many People Show". This is when I was looking for another country to live in, so it gave me an idea of what Gothenburg was about (and why I eventually moved!).

In October of 2004, I was bored one Wednesday evening, so I just asked Slaygon whether I could do a bonus show. This was known as The Bowness Bit o' Bollocks (Bowness pronounced "bonus" of course, and "bollocks" being a typically English word for, in this case, "nonsense"). It wasn't a regular show then, but at the same time, The Z Show was starting to feel a bit "stale"; I had moved into a separate apartment and Kenz had just gotten married, so it was become difficult for us to do a show every Sunday. BBB became more regular, and in May of 2005 it became a weekly show. The last Z Show was aired on 12th June 2005, one week before I moved to Sweden, and now I just do the BBB every Wednesday (and appear on other shows sometimes too).

**OSG:** You are probably best known for your eccentric on-air personality, and I can recall a time or two when you seemed to go out of your way to make a point that you don't really act as unhinged in the real world; care to give us a bit of background on what kind of person you are ?

**BOZ:** Haha, very well put! I'm basically a very laid back guy, hardly anything phases me or gets me angry. I have a typical, dry, English sense of humor too, and I am a little eccentric I suppose! What you hear on-air is basically me – but sometimes on air I fake getting angry about something, just for the fun of it. I never really get that angry about anything! But essentially, what you hear on the radio is what you'd hear if I was talking to myself!

**OSG:** Why did you move to Sweden? (laughs) Actually, before you answer that, I'm sure people are much more interested in why you decided to leave England – how about it?

**BOZ:** Haha, it's the question I've been asked the most, both in the chat room when doing a show, and in real life. The answer I usually give if I haven't got enough time to go into specifics is "two reasons: Broadband and women!" (the broadband here is great, and the females are of a very high quality, so I'm not lying!)

The real answer is slightly more complex though. Earlier I mentioned that I'm a very laid back kind of guy. It was getting to the stage where I noticed that less and less of my fellow Brits were as calm. Work was getting generally stressful, the English public transport is a joke, therefore the roads usually have jams somewhere in your journey; the attitude of Britain's youth seems to be "look after your-

self and don't give a damn about anyone else", the government only cares about themselves rather than us, and it was affecting my outlook on life. I needed a change, and the only way I could think about doing that was to give up the country where I was born. As mentioned, I'd visited Gothenburg before, and Slaygon very kindly offered to let me crash at his place while I was sorting out getting a Residency Permit, an apartment, and all of that. My original plan was to give it a year out here. Having lived for 7 months of that year, I can tell you now that I plan to stay here for the rest of my life. In general, Swedes are a lot more friendly, laid back and friendly. They're a little shy to start, but once you get them in a conversation, especially an English one where they can test their English skills – they're great conversationalists.

The Swedes have a word: "Lagom". It has no direct meaning in English, because it's a way of life, more than just a word. The nearest translation would be "just right." i.e. Not too much, not too little, etc. If a Swede asks how much milk you want in your coffee, you can say "Lagom" and they'll put just the right amount in. And that's the laid-back kind of country I needed to find!

*Old Skool Games would like to thank Mr. Bowness for taking some time out to answer all of our questions. We would also like to invite all of our readers to tune in to SLAY Radio any time of the day, to check out some of the talented remixers that are constantly working on their favorite C64 tunes. Readers can also register a user account with SLAY Radio, which will give them access to the immensely large playlist, which they can make requests from, as well as access to a message board, and torrent downloads of past LIVE shows and other special events.*

[Click here to visit SLAY Radio](#)

[Click here to visit R.K.O - A C64 Remix Archive](#)



( Alistair Bowness )

# Firelord

Review by: David K

Sometimes it is hard to look back on a game you used to adore in the past, only to come to the conclusion that it really hasn't aged very well, or that perhaps, it wasn't even very good to begin with. Firelord, in my case, just happens to be one of those examples. It was the very first game I ever played on my C64, back near the end of the eighties, and I remember being completely awestruck by its great title tune and its colorful, detailed graphics. Hours and hours I wasted, roaming the lands of Torot, while I really should have been doing my homework instead. So it actually is all the more sad that, upon reacquainting myself with the game, I ended up being bored very quickly. Even to the point where I genuinely wonder what it was that got me hooked in the first place, all those years ago.

You take on the role of Sir Galaheart, a knight on a quest to liberate the lands of Torot from an evil, magic wielding queen. Not by violently hacking her to pieces with your sword, like most adventurers would have done, but by nicely conning her into letting you have the source of her power; the Fire Stone. "How in blazes is he going to do that?!" I hear you ask. Simple, because apart from being decidedly wicked, this queen also is a terribly vain creature, whose biggest fear is growing old and losing her looks. So we find Sir Galaheart, setting out to retrieve the four ingredients of The Spell of Eternal Youth, which he intends to swap with the queen's magic Fire Stone.

Firelord is an action adventure. Or at least it tries its best to be one, because in truth there really isn't a lot of action or adventure to be had during play. Most of the time you end up mindlessly walking around the lands of Torot, in a desperate attempt to retrieve all four ingredients for your spell. I actually have to confess that even though I must have spent months playing it in the past, I never managed to finish it, let alone find just one of the necessary spell components. This not just thanks to my own horribly inadequate mapping skills (although granted, it probably has something to do with that as well), but also because Torot is a rather huge place. It counts no less than 500 screens, all laid out in a maze-like fashion of course, and with teleporting spots thrown in all over the place to add to the confusion. The fact that after a while you end up encountering the same houses and scenery over and over again certainly doesn't help much either. It might all look great, but what's the point in repeating everything to death? Half of the time I felt as if I was walking around in circles, and worse, I was probably doing exactly that. Now if you find that chasing your own tail for hours on an end makes for a great adventure, then of course, this is the ideal game for you; but if not, it just ends up being fairly pointless rather quickly.



All of this wouldn't actually be so bad if there was enough action or interaction to be had along the way. Sadly, even in that respect, Firelord comes away rather badly. Sure, there are quite a lot of enemies to be found in Torot, and they even re-spawn at random after leaving a screen, but it also seems that they are of the brain-dead variety. Your foes seem content enough with simply running around the screen, not really caring about whether you are around or not, so you never really feel very threatened at all. Perhaps that is all for the better too, because our brave Sir Galaheart actually manages to show up for his quest without so much as a weapon! You read that right. No sword, no bow, no nothing. On occasion you can pick up fire crystals, which give you the limited ability to fire at your enemies, but these run out rather quickly, and are really no substitute for coming equipped with say - a broad sword, or battle-axe. I am

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aware that this game isn't Golden Axe, but I would have appreciated at least a couple of different ways of dealing with my enemies. Mighty fine planning on Sir Galahearts behalf! Also, it seems Sir Galaheart's health is not exactly as great as it could be (and should be, for a knight) either, because his life force runs out merely by walking. Your life can be prolonged by picking up food that you occasionally come across, but since energy runs out rather fast, you still end up dying a lot. If there is one thing that I find really annoying in these types of games, it is having to spend most of my time trying to keep my health up, instead of being able to concentrate on the task at hand.



You would at least expect that the inhabitants of the various houses you come across would try to aid you in your ordeal. After all it is *their* country you are trying to liberate. Again, no such luck here. Information and items come at a price, namely the same colored crystals you pick up to shoot. The information these villagers hand out really isn't of the most helpful kind, mostly stating in what area of Torot you currently are. So you really are better off just holding on to your crystals instead. Of course, being the honorable knight you are, you can always try to steal information and items when the villager you barter with is not looking. This is done by quickly clicking on your item, and then the "steal" icon at the side of the screen. If you fail though, you have to undertake a couple of reaction tests to try and come away innocent. This is done by stopping an arrow at the word "innocent" three times in a row. For each time you miss, you lose a life.

Now is there anything about Firelord that I actually *did* like? Yes. I can safely say that the title music is about as good as it gets on the C64. The sound effects and in-game music might be limited to the occasional blips and beeps, but the opening track is definitely a winner. It is actually quite funny to find yourself whistling to a twenty year old video game tune while walking or working, and trust me, you can expect to whistle this one a lot. It really has lost none of its magic overtime and still is as great as the first time I heard it. Don't believe me? Start up Firelord, or alternatively try and find the tune on the net, and you'll see (or rather hear), for yourself. It's just a shame that with better than average graphics (which actually still hold up pretty decently these days), and such a great song on the opening screen, the game itself couldn't have been a bit more interesting or fun to play. Perhaps it is time for someone to actually do a remake. Incorporate a few real adventure elements and puzzles, or perhaps slightly more intelligent enemies. For what it's worth though, you are better off spending your time with any of the other hundreds of similar, more exciting games instead.

## Ranarama

Review by: David K

Life as a sorcerer's apprentice is not easy. One minute you are happily brewing potions in a sad and desperate attempt to improve your looks. The next, you end up hopping along a cold dungeon floor with a peculiar taste for flies. Alas, this is the story of young Mervyn. To make matters worse, it just so happens that in the very same moment you make your unwilling transformation from geeky scholar, to fly-swatting amphibian, the dungeon comes under attack from a legion of warlocks and their minions, mercilessly killing everyone in their path. Everyone except for Mervyn that is; who is thankfully mistaken for an ordinary frog and left alive



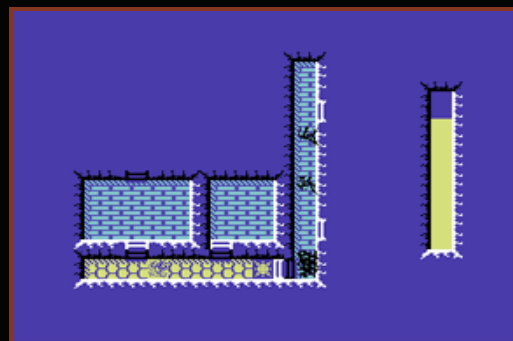
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to croak another day. Naturally it's up to you, assuming the role of Mervyn the frog, to clear the dungeon of the evil warlocks, their henchmen, and perhaps even revert back to your original human form in the end. At first glance the game looks like a cheap single player Gauntlet knock-off, complete with overhead view and monster spewing generators. While this might ring true to some extent, Ranarama does add quite a lot of interesting features to the tried 'n tested dungeon crawler genre.

Take for instance the layout of the dungeon itself. Instead of instantly revealing the entire play area, you have to uncover everything piece by piece as you go. Hopping through a door reveals the contents of that particular corridor or room (which afterwards does stay visible on the screen), and makes for a nice sense of adventure and mystery, leaving you never quite knowing what to expect next. There are also hidden doors aplenty, which can be found by simply standing still and pressing the fire button; which is rather difficult and not recommended when being attacked by multiple enemies. During his travels, Mervyn's life force slowly goes down (this also happens when bumping into various enemies), and this can only be replenished by picking up power crystals.

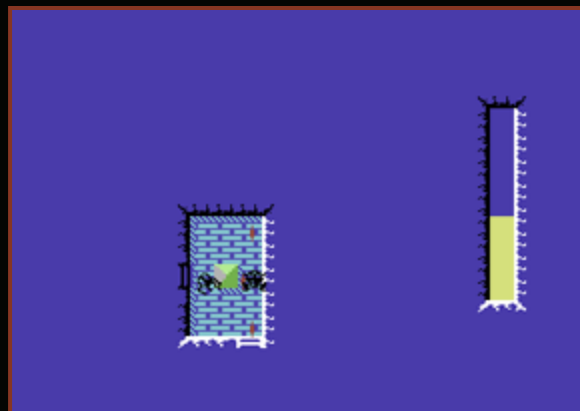
Glyphs of power are occasionally found on the floor during your travels and make for another nice addition, with each variety having a different use. You activate Glyphs by standing on top of them. "Way Glyphs" for example, act as transporters and teleport you to a different level, while "Seeing Glyphs" reveal a map of the already visited parts of the dungeon. The "Glyphs of Sorcery" allow Mervyn to change the type and power of spell he is using (power, attack, defense and effect). This comes in handy during his travels, since he will gradually meet more powerful foes who are only affected by the stronger spell levels. Upgrading these powers is done by exchanging runes, which you in turn acquire by defeating the warlocks themselves. Be careful though, because using higher level spells also makes Mervyn's life force drain faster!



Now, defeating these warlocks is possible in two different ways. You can always use the good old fashioned technique of magically blasting them to kingdom come (always very effective, that one), but you can also choose to engage them in a battle of wills. This is done by bumping straight into them, and takes you into a Paradroid-like sub-game. In this game, the letters "ranarama" appear jumbled on-screen, and it's up to you to place them in the correct order by swapping pairs of them, all in a set time limit of course. Failure ends in energy loss or death, while victory spells doom for the warlock and gives you new runes. Beware though, these only appear for a short time and should be picked up as soon as possible!

Graphically, Ranarama is decent enough, with nicely (though quite small) animated enemies and colorful dungeon rooms. It is nowhere near the quality of similar Gauntlet-like games, such as Druid (or its sequels), but overall it manages to be more than adequate enough. Control might appear a bit choppy in the beginning and moving Mervyn around takes some getting used to, but once you get the hang of it you should be fine. Occasionally it does appear that the game is a tad unresponsive though, and this can be quite frustrating at the higher difficulty levels later on, but this problem is not really bad enough to spoil the fun. As far as the music is concerned, apart from the tune on the title screen everything remains pretty much silent, save for the odd sound effect here and there. In that respect, Hewson could have put forth more effort, but then again, the silence does sort of fit very well with the mood of the game.

All in all Ranarama does come recommended from me, despite the small problems it has with the controls. If you are looking for a fun, but very challenging dungeon crawler and lack the friends to play Gauntlet (yes that would be me), then you could do worse than check out this game.



# Magical Chase

Review by: Zachary Bartels

Magical Chase is probably the single most rare TG-16 game in North America (and likely elsewhere), and to top it off, it routinely goes for hundreds of dollars on Ebay. You are probably wondering what kind of game could possibly go for that much money, and just what kind of game would warrant a price that rivals today's top console technology; well my friends, Magical Chase is that kind of game. Now don't take this information at face value before you rush out there to buy it, as you will soon read about, Magical Chase is a great game; but it's still a game, and I personally would never pay the money people charge for it online. The best way to describe the story behind this one is to simply quote it.

*"Ripple is a student of magic, and her teacher is a terrifying witch. Ripple's particularly afraid of her teacher right now, because she's just broken a promise she made to the witch: Ripple took a peek inside the forbidden book Sleeping Demons! No sooner had she opened the cover than out jumped six demons, which raced away! Unless she can catch all six demons and get them back inside the book, the witch will turn Ripple into a frog for breaking her promise! Ripple starts off on her quest with her two Elf-Star friends, Topsy and Turvy. Good luck, Ripple!"*

One of the first things that stood out and got my attention was the music. The soundtrack does a good job of establishing the opening mood of the game, and together with the cartoonish graphics, also helps to set the atmosphere up as a serious, yet playful adventure. Magical Chase is straight up, old skool fun. I suppose the easiest way to describe the combination of music and graphics, in addition to excellent play control, would be that it gives you the feeling of a bonafied arcade gaming experience. The gameplay does follow the standard scrolling shooter formula, and your main job is to kill enemies for currency, which you then use to purchase tools and upgrades.

The appeal of the game is that although most shooters are basically the same, Magical Chase seeks to touch a world not often used; Traditional fantasy.. Usually shooters consist of high-tech, futuristic environments, or something similar to our modern world, but you just have to give props to a game where you fly around on a broomstick and purchase upgrades from a friggin' pumpkin balloon. Another great feature about these stores is that they can appear more than one time per stage, so planning your strategy around that option definitely helps give you an edge. The one thing that bothers me about Magical Chase is the way you use spells and other items you've purchased; hitting the fire button twice. It just doesn't feel natural to hold down the fire button for the entire level, especially in a shooter, of all things. Nevertheless once you get used to the idea, things become second nature.

Finally, the Star Maidens are a pretty cool accessory to have, and you never lose them, which is quite helpful in itself. There are various ways you can manipulate them, such as purchasing upgrades so they do more damage, using them to form a concentrated burst of fire, and also using them as a shield against certain objects. Most of this is accomplished simply by pressing the d-pad in different directions, and holding it there. Once you start trying out new main weapon types and Star Maiden upgrades, you will soon find an ideal combination that works well for your playing style. Overall there is nothing terribly bad to say about Magical Chase. It has challenging level designs, a variety of attacks, great arcade-style music, and you get to blast a lot of cute'n cuddlies. What more could you ask for?



# Pro Wrestling

Review by: Tres Bradshaw

As a huge professional wrestling fan entering my teens back in 1986, my options for wrestling video games to play were quite limited. In the arcades, there was a personal favorite of mine, Taito's "Mat Mania", and also Data East's "Tag Team Wrestling". Mindscape's "Bop 'N Wrestle" had been somewhat popular on the Apple IIC and Commodore 64 computers, along with Epyx's "Championship Wrestling". Console gamers, largely due to technological limitations (I use the Atari 2600 game, "Title Match Pro Wrestling" as an example - bad stuff) had essentially been left out in the cold insofar as wrestling games were concerned. Wrestling fans' prayers were answered with the American release of the NES, which at the time sported three wrestling titles. Data East's "Tag Team Wrestling", a very close rendition of the arcade version, Bandai's "M.U.S.C.L.E.", based on the popular at the time, miniature wrestling figures, and my favorite of all, NES's own, "Pro Wrestling". Needless to say, my passion for the fat man in the red suit to deliver an NES for Christmas was fueled by my desire to get my hands on "Pro Wrestling". I received my NES, and "Pro Wrestling", and hundreds of hours of gameplay later, it still remains one of my favorite wrestling games of all time.

In my opinion, Pro Wrestling resembles "Mat Mania", more than any other arcade wrestling title from the time. Although I believe "Mat Mania" has better gameplay, Pro Wrestling one-ups it by allowing gamers to use one of six wrestlers to battle for the VWA and VWF wrestling titles. The game progresses as the player wrestles against all other wrestlers once, to earn a VWA title shot against King Slender. After becoming the VWA champ, you defend that title ten times before matching up against the VWF grand champion of the game, The Great Puma! As in essentially all wrestling games, each wrestler has one or two signature moves, along with a list of standard moves such as suplexes and clotheslines that all wrestlers can perform. Fighter Hayabusa, is the most generic looking of the wrestlers, and offers "The Back Brain Kick", which is the one move in the game that takes perfect timing and practice to pull off effectively (curiously, the AI never uses this move). Star Man, in my opinion, the easiest to play, is the classic masked man in the game and has two signature moves, "The Somersault Kick" and "The Flying Cross Chop".



Kin Corn Karn is the big guy from Mongolia, and has two easy signature moves, "The Mongolian Chop", and "The Karate Kick". Every wrestling game has to have a wrestler to perform "The Claw", so we have Giant Panther, who has two signature moves, "The Iron Claw", and "The Head Butt". In the spirit of the great wrestler, Abdullah the Butcher, Pro Wrestling has The Amazon, who loves to munch on the competition with "The Piranah Bite" and use his foreign object to carve up his opponents' head with "The Outlaw Choke". Finally, there is King Slender, who is the VWA Champ and has "The Back Breaker" as his signature move. Once you earn a VWF title shot with The Great Puma, you will discover that he can perform all the special moves of the other wrestlers, which makes him extra tough to defeat.


The music is repetitive and eventually annoying, but still fairly good for such an early NES title. The graphics are simple, but the choice of colors used makes them effective. Gameplay is quite simple, and the learning curve is less than an hour, although it takes practice to progress through the entire game. If you get stuck trying to beat a particular wrestler, you can always use the cheesy 20-second count-out strategy, which still counts as a win. In fact, that is the quickest way to play through to The Great Puma, and nine out of ten times, how most players defeat him.

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What is most annoying is how often the AI telegraphs the exact moves you are trying to execute. For example, if you are playing as Star Man, and you try to pull off "The Somersault Kick", which is down on the control pad and the A button, the AI will try to execute a pile driver, which for all other wrestlers is down on the control pad and the A button. The same thing happens when executing other moves in the game, such as suplexes and body slams. The only other grievance I have with the game is that it would have been nice to have more wrestlers to choose from, but then again, we are talking about an 8 bit cartridge. In summation, Pro Wrestling is not the perfect wrestling game, and probably not the best wrestling game for the NES, since there were other wrestling games released later on. For its time, it was pretty darn good, and the best thing going for console gamers.




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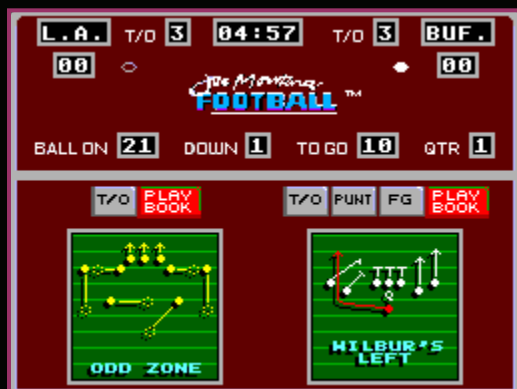
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# Joe Montana Football

Review by: *Eric Ladd*



When I was young and heavy into the NES, I probably spent ninety percent of my free time playing Tecmo Super Bowl. To this day I am a huge fan of the game, so I have decided to finally take a look at the 8-bit competition to the Tecmo Bowl series; Joe Montana Football, for the Sega Master System.

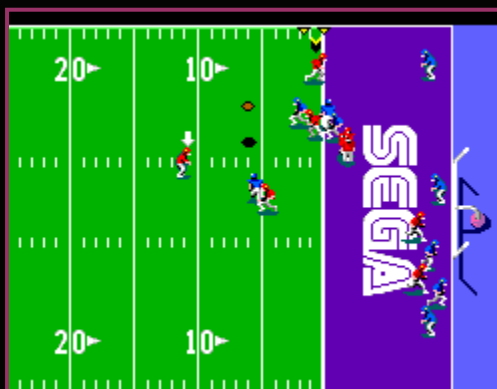
I fired it up and was greeted by the title screen; so far so good. That is until I hit start. There is literally only one play mode, and the only options you get are one or two players, and three difficulty settings. I really wish there were other modes, like some sort of season mode. Even sports games that came years before this one at least had password systems.

Regardless, I pressed on and next came to the team select screen. It was nice to see all (at the time) twenty-eight NFL teams represented, and naturally I made a childhood choice. I chose to play as Los Angeles, since I was all about the Raiders back in the day, and for my opponent I chose Buffalo, since my brother loved the Bills. I should say that the only reference to the NFL in the whole game is Joe Montana's name on the title screen and scoreboard. The teams are only called by the city, and the players are never referenced. It doesn't matter much, I guess, since the gameplay itself is what matters most, and after winning the coin toss, off to the game I went.

Once on the field, I got a taste of the game's presentation. The field looks fine, and resembles every other football game field of the era. The players at least look and move like people, even though the animation isn't the smoothest in the world. The sound is almost non-existent. There is no in-game music, which is a good thing since it leaves the audience for ambience. Of course it's typical 8-bit audience "noise", but it does its job surprisingly well. The rest of the sounds, however, don't really pull through. There are no sounds of players colliding, which really takes away from the game. All you get are primitive "beeps and boops" representing hiking, catching and tackling, and a decent whistle.

Kicking off to the other team left me wondering a bit as well. There was no power meter, no aim bar, nothing. Is there no way to control kicks? Do you have to do the same exact kick every time? As far as I could tell, yes. This would hold true for punting and field goals as well. The rest of the defense side was better at least. You are given a decent selection of defensive formations, ranging from a goal line blitz to a wide zone coverage. Basically, you just move around and try to bump into whoever has the ball to tackle them. There doesn't seem to be any way around it, as once the carrier is tapped, he is down. It's a bit simplistic, but it works and it doesn't hinder the game much.

So their first time down the field, the computer got a field goal and was up 0 - 3. Now I had the ball, and got a taste of offense. There are more offensive plays, thankfully, and you can even see "Joe's Play" for a bit of a tip. Controlling the players on both offense and defense is simple and just requires moving the d-pad where you want to run. As the quarterback, you use the second button to select your target, and the first button passes to him, or pitches to a running back. It's pretty standard football game fare, but being a Tecmo player, there was one thing about it I loved that Tecmo didn't have. When you choose run plays, you aren't bound to a set path and handoff like on Tecmo. You control the quarterback however you wish, and then have the option to hand off or pitch to the runner whenever you want. This increased control is a definite plus. Anyway, still getting the hang of things, I threw an interception.



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With the ball again, the computer scored a touchdown, and lead 0 - 10. Next time I had the ball, I fought harder and got my own touchdown. I then forced the CPU to punt, and fought all the way to the end zone again, where they intercepted it. I forced another punt, and this time got a field goal, tying the score at 10. I forced a punt one more time, picked up another field goal to take the lead, and then barely held them out of field goal range to win 13 - 10! I played on normal difficulty and found the challenge to be just about right, and I can imagine it taking a bit of practice to do well on the harder setting.

What did I find in Joe Montana Football? Well, I found out how the Master System wasn't keeping up with the NES. However, I also found a fun little football game, and one that I wouldn't have been too disappointed with

back in the day. The presentation is fine, although the sound could have used a little work, but I had a pretty good time against the computer. I imagine that playing against another human player would be fun. At the end of the day, though, I am still spoiled by Tecmo Super Bowl, and would have to recommend that over Joe Montana Football.

## Out Run 3D

Review by: *Eric Ladd*

I've always been split down the middle when it comes to driving games. The ones that strive to be realistic always get on my nerves (Gran Turismo, Nascar), but I really enjoy some of the outrageous and/or fake ones (Burnout, SF Rush). Fortunately, Out Run 3D for the Sega Master System is based on an arcade game, which almost automatically means it will be more fun than any simulator could ever be. Regardless, I have never played the original arcade Out Run, so I will be looking at this game from a pretty fresh perspective. That's probably a good thing, since I'm willing to bet this version is nowhere near as good.

When you first start the game up you're treated to the familiar Sega tone, followed by a gameplay demo accompanied by some pretty decent music. I hope you like the music on the game, because that's almost all you'll hear throughout, but more on that in a bit. If you press the actual Start button on the controller, you can access a sound test, and the 3-D option. This game makes use of the Master System 3-D glasses that some of you may remember. Unfortunately I don't have access to a set of these, so this review will only cover the 2-D mode of the game.

After you press a button to start, you choose from one of three difficulty levels, and off you go to your car to make one more choice. Here you see a car dashboard with a hand to change the radio station, a neat way to let you choose the music to drive to. It would have been nice to have the songs play while on the radio screen, but each time you press the reset button, the game starts over at the gameplay demo and cycles to the next song, so you can still check them out beforehand. There are four songs to choose from, and my favorite is Midnight Highway. The others are forgettable, and seem out of place. I feel like Midnight Highway matches the atmosphere of the game best, and has an "adventurous" feel to it. That probably sounds lame, so let's just get to the race.

Well, the game isn't really racing in the traditional sense. The "race" is against time, as you drive over hills and around curves from checkpoint to checkpoint, earning bonus seconds each time you reach one. The only other cars on the road are slow moving traffic to get in your way. Bumping one of them usually results in a slight spinout without losing much speed. Along some sections of the road, there are objects like trees or signs. Hitting these will send your car flipping, after which you must waste valuable seconds restarting from a



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dead stop. Seeing these objects go by does point out one visual flaw with the game, though. The frame count is pretty low, especially noticeable when you are moving slowly, but for a 3-D game on the Master System, I wasn't surprised by this. Fortunately, when you are driving fast, which is hopefully always, then the illusion of quick movement is there, and I guess that's what is most important.

Every so often there will be a fork in the road, where you choose to go either left or right, with each road taking you into a different location. All of the locations look pretty nice, and I don't remember wondering what an area was supposed to be representing. Some examples are a beach area, fields and mountains, or a night time city skyline. The objects throughout the courses look alright, meaning cars are obviously cars, trees are obviously trees, etc. Still, you probably won't be awestruck by them. The game is very bright and colorful, and this goes a long way towards distinguishing the different areas from each other. I especially liked coming up on a tunnel for the first time and seeing how they made that look, but don't get mad at me if something like Rad Racer did it first; I'm no expert.

Now, remember when I said choose a song you like because it's all you'll hear? Well, sound happens to be another one of those downsides I mentioned. The song you choose for the radio is about ninety-nine percent of what you'll hear the whole race. There are some light sound effects that pop up however, like tires squealing on big turns, engines on cars you are passing, or the sound of your vehicle crashing. The biggest complaint I have with the sound, though, is the lack of feedback about your own car.

When you slide on curves, slowdown around tight corners, or bump into another car, the only feedback you have about how much you slowed down are the meters at the top right of the screen. The meters will flash when you need to change gears, but some aural feedback would have been nice. Normally it isn't an issue, but if you are in a tough area of the game then it can be troublesome to take your attention away from the road even for a second.

No matter how tight the situation gets, using the controller stays simple, with a gas button, a brake button, steering left and right, and up and down being used to change gears. There even seems to be a semi-boost of sorts, initiated by releasing the gas for a moment then pressing it again almost immediately. A great deal of the use I got from this was in cornering, as it temporarily increases your traction, although I did see it happen on open straightaways from time to time. I was a bit worried at first, because the left and right steering felt a little delayed, but I adjusted quickly and it wasn't a problem. The only other thing that bothered me was occasionally bumping the up direction on accident and shifting my car into low gear. Maybe my controller sucks, or maybe I lack coordination, but the few times it happened it was annoying, and it's something you should be careful about.



I think Out Run 3D for the Sega Master System is a great example of the old skool gamer's philosophy. This game doesn't look or sound that great at all, but fun and solid gameplay is there, and I found myself strangely compelled to keep driving. The gameplay was satisfying and relaxing, as the lack of a real "race" took away a lot of the pressure. Even though the clock was still there, I never paid attention to it and just had fun navigating the roads. If I made it in time, then great, but if I didn't, then I didn't care. Games that are fun despite the technology or age from which they come are what "old skool" gaming is about, and I recommend you take Out Run 3D for a spin.



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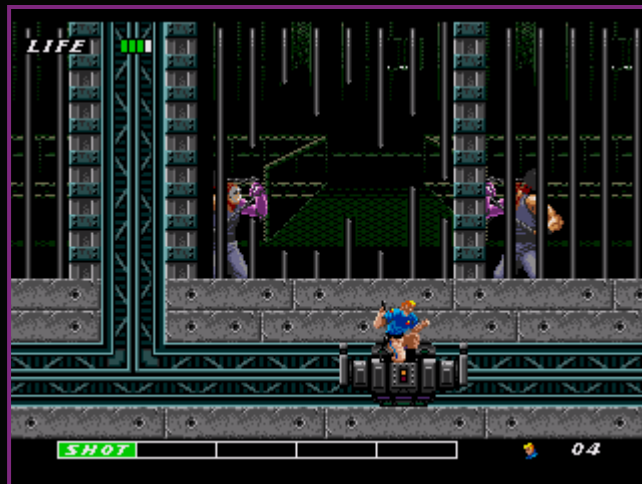
# ESWAT

Review by: [Eric Ladd](#)

I could start by saying that ESWAT was an enlightening experience for me, I would be making stuff up if I did, but it did make me realize (or maybe remember) a few things. First, I realized that I still have a deep love for almost any side scrolling platform game; anything from 8 Eyes to Zen: Intergalactic Ninja, with my favorite probably being Sunset Riders. Then it made me realize that the reason for this is probably because so many of them are SO MUCH alike. In many cases it comes down to the "if you like one, you like them all" mentality, and ESWAT kind of falls into this category for me.

The story of the game follows your character, a member of the ESWAT Cyber Police (no, really?) unit. The Government recruits the best of the best, this of course being you, for a new crime fighting unit which will use special combat suits to do battle with E.V.E., a very powerful terrorist group. The setting looks and feels futuristic, and many of the enemies you face are robotic or cyborg in nature. The environments you'll pass through include city streets, an old jail, and a creepy looking lab that reminds me of scenery from Super Metroid (yes, I know this came out first). You will do battle both as a regular human, and while wearing your combat suit. Anime fans may be familiar with the OVA series called Bubblegum Crisis, and the premise here is very similar.

As I said, you play some parts as a regular human, and some parts in the special armor suit. Generic controls are the same for both, and are pretty generic to the genre. You can walk, crawl, jump, and shoot forwards or up. Holding up while jumping allows you to jump higher, or in some special areas, to change planes, like jumping to a high ledge or behind a fence. If you have played Shinobi (the original, not the crappy sequels), you'll be familiar with all of this. When wearing the armored suit, you gain some new functionality. By pressing jump and then holding it, you can use a rocket backpack to hover or fly for a limited time. This backpack recharges, albeit slowly, so running out of juice is not a problem. You also gain access to more weapons. As a human you only have a pistol, but in the suit, you have single shot, a rapid super shot, a rocket launcher, a chargeable fireball shot (a la Street Fighter), and every game/cartoon/comic ever made in Japan), and a huge flamethrower attack. The game definitely gets a lot more interesting when you get this suit and the new weapons, especially since there are variations in enemies, such that one weapon is better suited to killing than another.



I was really impressed with the way everything looked, and it all really fit in with the style and setting the game was going for. The missions feel quite varied as you move through them, thanks mostly to the different areas being so unique. Each area has different things going on around you and in the background, whether its guard turrets sneaking up on you in the jail, or monsters busting out of boxes outside. I have always enjoyed games that use the levels and surroundings interactively, and things like this make the game more enjoyable, and in some cases much more surprising. The first time someone suddenly jumps out of a window in the first level,

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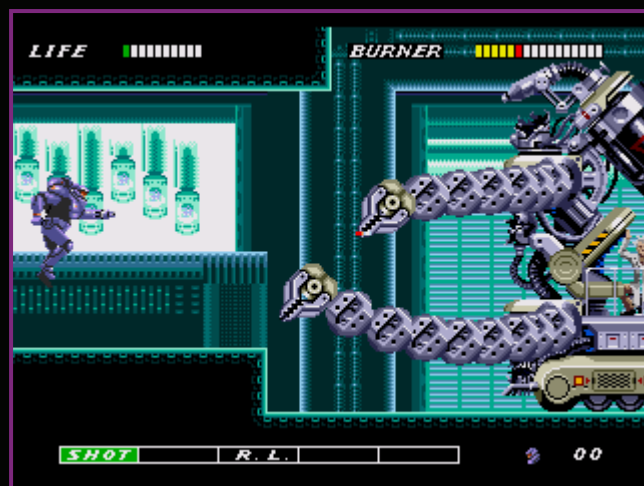
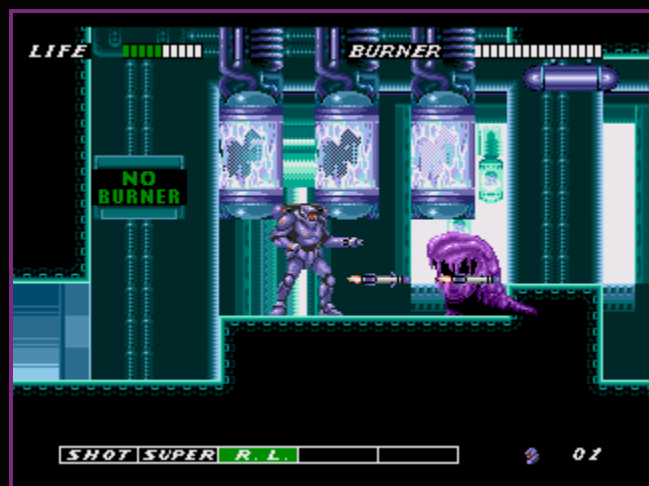


you'll probably know what I mean. I don't really have much to say about the sound. The effects were fine, and imitated exactly what they were supposed to. Everything I heard was clearly identifiable, and I like the fact that the sound of taking damage is a pretty annoying buzz. This makes sure that you're aware of what's going on, and makes you want to get out of trouble to make it stop. Remember wandering around on *The Legend of Zelda* with little health, frantically trying to stop that annoying beep? It's the same idea here, just not as extreme. The music was nothing to get excited about, as it's pretty generic upbeat stuff, but it didn't seem to matter anyway because I hardly even remember listening to it while I played. I'm not saying it was bad, but for all the times I have played the game, I don't once remember really noticing it, paying attention to it, or being impressed by it during any particular level.



I had a lot of fun with this game, and really enjoyed the atmosphere it brought to the platformer genre. The setting is pretty interesting if you're into the whole "Cyberpunk" thing, and playing with the armored suit's various weapons makes for a good time. The game is pretty difficult, as well, at times requiring great reflexes and coordination, and at other times forcing you to make use of the various weapons and abilities of the armored suits just to progress through the levels. It suffers a bit from the bosses having learnable patterns, but loads of games have that, and it doesn't bring the grade down too much. The game still offers a pretty good balance of "fast dodging and attacking" and "making good use of resources". But what really made ESWAT great was that it comes right back to an age old formula. At its core it's a somewhat generic platform shooter, and for fans of the genre, it seems to take all the classic ingredients, and use them in just the right ways.

Your opinion of the genre will pretty much make or break your opinion of the game. I feel like ESWAT has a deserving spot right alongside *Mega Man* and *Midnight Resistance*, and action / platformer fans won't be disappointed.



# Rastan Saga II

Review by: *Eric Ladd*

Quite a while ago, I spent some time with Rastan Saga II. I hated it, thought there was hardly anything good about it, considered it a pathetic sequel to one of my favorite childhood arcade games, and was ready to trash it in this review. I spent some more time with it recently, and it left me wondering what the heck happened. I found a game that really had me getting into it, with some interesting level designs and pretty well done game mechanics. Did I really miss so much all those times I played it back then? I don't know, but since I'm apparently in a better mood about it now, let's take a look.

According to the English story screens in the game, there is a sacred place called "Rastania", in which there is a temple called "Skyscraper". Whoever conquers "Skyscraper" would rule "Rastania". As it turns out, a group of evildoers has already entered the temple and tried to take over, so it's up to you to stop them. It's not the most original story in the world, but the way it's stated is pretty amusing at least. I'm also not sure it makes a lot of sense, since I saw more outdoor levels than indoors, but I'm not going to complain.



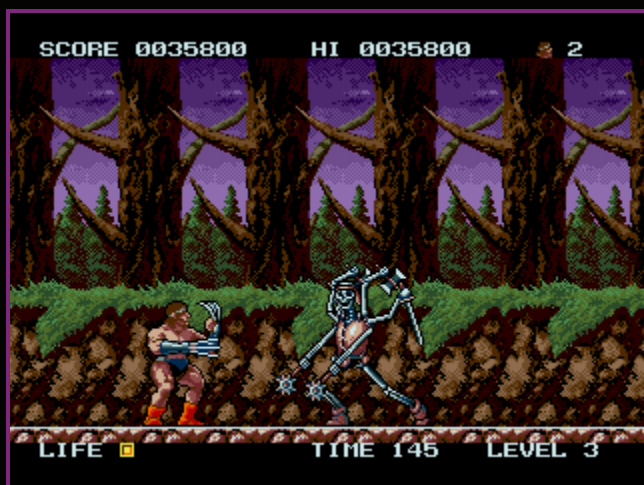
If you have played many platformers, you already know most of what's going on here. Long side-scrolling levels, enemies to attack, jumping puzzles, and lots of randomly arranged blocks and floating platforms. It's pretty standard stuff for the most part, although the rope swinging segments are a nice addition. The monsters ranged from bland to excellent in design, with some of the more interesting ones making me think, "I hope that guy isn't as hard as he looks". My particular favorite enemy was the huge flying wolverine monster with giant claws, although the six-armed skeleton wins an honorable mention. I thought the backgrounds looked pretty nice overall, but had one shortcoming. They are very repetitive, showing the same little bit over and over and over, but when you are concentrating on the game and just glancing at them, they come across well. There were some very impressive aspects of the level design, though, and it has to do with one facet of the controls.

First let's look at the standard controls a bit. By default, your barbarian type character carries a one-handed sword and a shield. You can, however, change between weapons if you find them, usually after killing an enemy; I came across clawed gloves, and a giant two-handed sword. There are some other items to find as well, like a magic shock for your weapons, floating orbs that protect you, and some whose intentions were totally lost on me (cape?). Controls are generic, with attack, jump, walk, and duck functions. The walking seems a bit too slow for my tastes, and the jumping sometimes feels like it lacks some precision and control, but neither of these are critical problems, particularly since I never came across any jumping puzzles that were not doable. It sure makes me long for the perfection that is the midair control of Contra, though. Some neat additions to the control scheme are the ability to look and attack upward, and to jump and stab down, ala Zelda



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II. One of the really interesting qualities of the game involves the other use of your equipment and how it is implemented in the gameplay.

When not attacking, your shield/claw/whatever will act as a ... well ... as a shield. This provides you with high standing blocks, low crouching blocks, and even blocks for overhead by looking up. In this game, many enemies, especially bosses, also have defenses and different heights for attacks. There is frequently a strategic way to go about this game as opposed to just going Rambo on everything. For instance, some monsters might attack and block high, so you need to attack low, or another monster might cling to the ceiling and throw things down, forcing you to shield your head from the top. This even works well for the general environment, like on the level with the fire erupting from walls that you can block and walk against. I think these implements add a very nice strategic touch to the game and keep it from being a boring hack-n-slash.

My biggest problem with the game is the sound. First of all the effects are pretty pathetic, and in many cases are either too quiet, or don't sound like what they are representing. How about a big clang for when you or the enemy blocks an attack? Not even close. The explosion noise is decent at best, but the rest are almost worthless. The music, on the other hand, isn't too bad, but it just doesn't seem to belong either. The impression I got from the music was that of some kind of urban mystery setting, like that game *Deja Vu* or something. I didn't really have any problems with the songs themselves, but given the setting, I would have gone for something deeper or lower, and perhaps more dramatic, to fit the fantasy theme.

Like I originally said, I don't know how I went from hating this game so much to liking it so much. Did I always used to play it as a hack-n-slash game, without realizing the thoughtful gameplay some parts offer? Did I never get as far back then and thus not see any of the cooler levels? Am I just glad to be playing games for awhile instead of being buried in homework? Regardless, I think this game offers some interesting play elements with the whole blocking idea, and while it may seem (or be) easy at first, the further you get, the more tough spots and tricky levels you will come across. As you progress, you'll notice the difficulty raising slowly, but never really crossing the line into being hard. The downside here is that many enemies and bosses have pretty simple patterns they follow, but even then, just using the blocking system makes the battles somewhat enjoyable. I say give *Rastan Saga II* a shot, and as long as you remember to use and take advantage of your defensive abilities, you should have a pretty good time.



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